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public limited company
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London
EC1A 7AJ

Patents ADP number (if you know it)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the
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4. Title of the invention

Announced Session Control

5. Name of your agent (if you have one)

ELKINGTON AND FIFE

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0171 405 3505

ANNOUNCED SESSION CONTROL

The present invention relates to the announcement and subsequent management of media stream connections for a media session over a communications network.

5

Multicast transmissions are becoming increasingly common on the Internet. In contrast to standard Internet Protocol (IP) point to point transmissions (unicast), IP multicast allows the simultaneous transmission of information to a group of recipients from a single source.

Routing support for IP multicast transmissions is provided by the MBone (IP Multicast

10 Backbone) which is a virtual network layered on top of the Internet.

IP multicast allows real-time communications over wide area IP networks and typical transmissions include video and audio conferencing, live multimedia training, university lectures and transmission of live television programmes.

15

A multicast transmission usually consists of a multimedia session made up of several individual media streams typically carrying video, audio, whiteboard or raw data. Some sessions are persistent, but the majority exist for a specific period of time, although need not be continuous. Multicast based transmissions on the MBone differ from unicast IP

20 transmissions in that any user receiving the transmission can join the session (unless the transmission is encrypted) and to receive a transmission, a user need only know the appropriate transmission address and timing information.

An example of an IP multicast transmission system is described with reference to Figure 1.

Prior to a multicast transmission, an appropriate announcement containing a session description is made, thereby allowing end users 110a-110e to elect to receive the transmission. Each end user electing to receive the transmission is linked to a group IP Multicast address 120 associated with the transmission. At the transmission time of the
5 multicast session, the session streams are transmitted from a source 130, or a plurality of sources, to the group address. At the group address, the transmission is disseminated along the links 140 to those end users who have elected to receive it (in this example end users 110a-110c).

- 10 An example of a conventional announcement and election system currently used is described with reference to Figure 2. Most public multicast sessions are announced at a single group IP multicast address 200 dedicated to the transmission of announcements to multicast end users. End users 210a-210e electing to receive the announcements are linked to the announcement group address and, in the same way as an actual session transmission,
15 each announcement arriving at the announcement group address is disseminated to the end users. A front end interface 220 on each end user's computer displays information obtained from the associated session description for each announcement. The minimum information a session description must contain is a time and date that the session will be active and the group IP multicast address(es) from which the end user may elect to receive one or more
20 media streams and to which they could send their own streams for the session. Using the front end interface, an end user can select the announced session(s), or their component stream(s) they wish to participate in and the interface then sets up the necessary links to the one or more group IP multicast addresses through an associated multicast multimedia

application.

Standard session descriptions are generated using a Session Description Protocol (SDP), as defined in the Internet Engineering Task Force's draft RFC 2327. SDP is a simple ASCII
5 text based protocol that is used to describe real time multimedia sessions and their related scheduling information. SDP messages are wrapped in a carrier protocol, known as a Session Announcement Protocol (SAP), which, in addition to containing the necessary IP addressing and routing information for transmission across the Internet or Mbone, allows the SDP message to be encrypted, signed or compressed. An announcement can then be
10 sent at regular intervals to the announcement group address. As an alternative to SAP, a session may be announced by placing an SDP message on a World Wide Web site (WWW) or by sending it to individuals by email or as a unicast transmission inviting them to participate.

15 An SDP message conveys information about each media stream in the multicast multimedia session to allow the recipients to participate in the session. A typical SDP message will include the session name and purpose, the time(s) and date(s) the session will be active, the component media streams of the session and information required to participate in each media stream (IP multicast address, port, media format). The SDP message may also
20 include details of the session's bandwidth requirements, an encryption key necessary to participate in a secure multicast transmission using public key encryption, contact information for the organiser of the multicast session, and a Unique Resource Indicator (URI) pointing to a WWW or an Intranet web site where further information on the session

may be found.

The level of participation a user may make in a session or stream depends on its purpose.

In a multicast television session, typically users would only be able to receive the session

5 streams whilst in a multicast conference session the communication would be bi-directional with a central server (such as group address 120) receiving each participants transmissions and relaying them to the other participants. The level of participation expected of a user in a session or stream may be explicitly stated in the session description or it may be inherent from the session description, for example when a receive-only application is associated
10 with a media stream type in the session description.

A common front end interface used by multicast end users is known as Session Directory Rendezvous (SDR). This interface takes the received announcements, decodes the SDP message and displays the names of those sessions that are still current in a list. The end

15 user may then select one of the listed announcements to view further technical and user-oriented details of the announced session. From the displayed information, the end user can then select to join individual streams of the session or to join the entire session. Once the streams to be joined are selected, SDR starts the necessary multicast-enabled multimedia application on the end user's computer, such as Vic and Vat, and passes the
20 relevant stream information (a transport port address) from the announcement onto the application allowing the application to establish the link to the associated IP multicast address and participate in the stream at transmission time. Having initiated the applications SDR plays no further part in the session.

Recent increased usage and demand for (multi)media sessions has highlighted a number of limitations in SDP. SDP limits session descriptions to defining a session having a single set of timings that apply to all of the streams within it. A session in which a stream starts mid-way through the transmission cannot easily be described using SDP. The structure of a session description written in SDP must be a simple linear list of streams which may not reflect the intuitive structure of a complex session. SDP supports a limited and predefined set of applications which can receive the streams and a limited and predefined set of transport mechanisms (e.g. Simple layering, RTP and UDP). As guaranteed Quality of Service (QoS) is becoming more and more desirable to the consumer and the supplier, the need to define QoS policies for the entire session and individual streams in terms of required system resources, bandwidth requirements and supported applications also needs to be met. There may also be requirements on the prioritisation of streams and subsessions or more complicated rules about receiving streams. A further requirement on the part of the supplier will be the need for charging facilities permitting the charging of an end user for a multicast transmission to which they subscribe according to the QoS and types of streams received etc. There is little scope to include information about QoS policies or charging within the conventional structure of an SDP session description, or any metadata about the session.

According to a first aspect of the present invention, a method of announcing a description of a media session, comprises the steps of generating a first base module containing user orientated data relating to the media session, generating at least one media module containing technical data necessary for a user to receive a media stream of the media

session, linking the first base module to the at least one media module, and announcing the media session by making at least the first base module available to potential recipients of the media session, wherein the link between the first base module and the at least one media module permits a party to access the at least one media module and subsequently
5 participate in the media session.

Preferably, the method further comprises the steps of generating a second base module, the second base module containing user orientated data relating to a sub-session of the media session, linking the second base module to the first base module, generating at least one
10 media module, and linking said at least one media module to the second base module.

A media module may prescribe the application to be used to participate in the media session. A media module may prescribe a number of application components to be used in order to build an application to participate in the media session. The media module may
15 prescribe a manner in which the components are to be configured to build the application.
A media module may declare a number of requirements which an application or a configuration of application components must satisfy in order to be used to participate in the media session.

20 According to a second aspect of the present invention, a computer readable storage medium contains data defining at least a part of a description of a media session, the session description comprising a first base module containing user orientated data relating to the media session, wherein the first base module includes a link to at least one media

module which provides technical data necessary for a user to receive a media stream of the media session, and wherein the link between the first base module and the at least one media module permits a party to access the at least one media module and subsequently receive the media stream.

5

A media module may prescribe the application to be used to participate in the media session. A media module may prescribe a number of application components to be used to build an application to participate in the media session. The media module may prescribe a manner in which the components are to be configured to build the application. A media
10 module may declare a number of requirements which an application or a configuration of application components must satisfy in order to be used to participate in the media session.

The present invention provides a modular description system for a media session in which session descriptions are constructed in a hierarchical manner providing a plurality of levels
15 of information concerning the constituent parts of the described session.

A problem faced with the current distribution of announcements from the single announcement group address is that there is a limit to the size of each announcement and the frequency with which each can be sent out. In the present invention, it is possible to
20 provide a modular description system in which a distributed announcement contains links available to the end user to other portions of the announcement which have not been transmitted.

Another problem faced by providers of current (multi)media sessions and the developers of the associated (multi)media applications is the spread of skills required to implement an application that can initiate and manage a real-time data connection over a communications network and perform the (multi)media functions the end user would expect. Furthermore, until now the only way a QoS policy could be implemented was to process a session description to determine which streams of a session could or should be run and then to initialise the applications so they connect to the respective streams. This required the communications manager not only to know about the session requirements and available system resources but also the capabilities of each application.

10

According to a third aspect of the present invention, a method of managing media stream connections for a media session, having obtained a session description of the media session at a terminal, comprises the steps of parsing the session description using a terminal session control system to determine one or more applications for the or each media stream of the session description needed to support the media session, selecting one or more media streams identified in the session description and subsequently initiating the one or more media streams so that the or each media stream can subsequently be received by the terminal, wherein the session control system manages the connections required to participate in the media session.

20

The applications may select one or more of the media streams identified in the session description which are required and pass a number of connection requests to the session control system.

The step of parsing the session description may include the steps of determining application configurations to satisfy requirements identified in the session description to participate in the media session.

5

Preferably, the terminal session control system parses the session description and passes at least a portion of the session description to an application builder for determining the application configurations. Preferably, the application builder builds the application(s) necessary to participate in the media session. The application builder may generate or
10 modify a quality of service policy for the connection request for use by the terminal session control system. The application builder may modify the session description for changing the subsequent management of connections by the terminal session control system. Preferably, the application is built from a number of application components.

15 According to a fourth aspect of the present invention, a system for managing media stream connections derived from a session description of a media session, comprises a session control system for parsing the session description to determine one or more applications for the or each media stream of the session description needed to support the media session, the session control system being arranged to manage connections required to receive the one or
20 more appropriate media streams of the media session.

Preferably, the session control system further comprises means for determining application configurations to satisfy requirements identified in the session description to participate in

the media session.

Preferably, there are a number of application components from which the application configurations are determined and from which the applications are built.

5

Preferably, an application builder builds the applications.

In a preferred example of the present invention the media modules of a session description are checked by the respective multimedia client application prior to QoS management, thereby reducing the workload of the communications manager. Furthermore, applications need only request streams from the session control system since this is now handles centrally the creation and management of streams in real time.

The present invention simplifies application development and service provision. A further problem is that applications should be able to adapt to available network and host resources. This is particularly important for multi-party applications operating in heterogeneous environments where each party may have different resources available to them. Furthermore the nature of the heterogeneity may vary over the lifetime of the session, for example as network congestion varies or as the terminal resources are shared with other applications or other users. The present invention is able to use a QoS policy incorporated within the session description to prioritise the allocation of resources and to determine whether participation in the session is viable.

A still further problem is that the application developer and service provider typically need to address security and charging requirements. The present invention allows security and charging policies to be incorporated within the session description for use within the session control system to invoke appropriate charging and security procedures. Instead of
5 having to develop security and charging functions the application developer and service provider need only specify appropriate policies.

In the present invention application development is simplified by using the session description to drive the dynamic management of communication channels and to adapt to
10 available resources. It also reduces the problem of handling charging and security requirements to a matter of specifying charging and security policies within the session description.

Examples of the present invention will now be described in detail with reference to the
15 accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic diagram illustrating a multicast transmission across the MBone;

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram illustrating the distribution of an SDP announcement;

Figure 3 is a block diagram of a modular session description of a simple session generated in accordance with the present invention;

20 Figure 4 is a block diagram of a modular session description of a complex session generated in accordance with the present invention;

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of a system for managing media stream connections;

Figure 6 is a flow chart illustrating the steps involved in managing a media session

according to the system of Figure 5;

Figure 7 is a flow chart further illustrating a parsing step of Figure 6; and,

Figure 8 is a schematic diagram of another system for managing media stream connections at a terminal in accordance with the present invention.

5

Figure 3 is a block diagram of a session description 300 for a simple multicast television session. The session description 300 comprises a base module 310 linked to a media module 320.

10 The base module 310 contains user oriented data relating to the session including the title and timing information. The base module 310 may also include a description or abstract, contact information about the organiser and a WWW or an intranet URI pointing to a web site containing further information. Ideally, the base module 310 should contain enough information for the user to decide if they are interested in participating in the session.

15

The media module 320 contains announcement data relating to a video stream of the session. The media module 320 contains the technical information (data) necessary for the user to receive the associated media stream. In particular, connection, timing and media format details are provided.

20

A first example of a session description 300 generated for transmission to end users is shown below:

```

(
  type=(base)
  id=(310)
  info=(title="live multicast television session")
  source=(name="A.Sender" email=asender@tx.com)
  media=(video=(client=odbits0.16))
  time=(length=50m repeat=continuous)
  category=("Entertainment")
  options=(none)
  modules=(m=320)
)
(
  type=(media)
  id=(320 310)
  media=(video=(client=odbits0.16))
  connection=(229.1.1.2/7000)
  time=(length=50m)
)

```

Session description example 1

The base module 310 has a unique identifier (id field) used in the generation of links between two modules during the processing of the session description. The modules field of the base module 310 lists the type and unique identifier of the media module 320 linked to the base module 310. The second identifier in the id field of the media module 320 is the unique identifier belonging to the base module 310 linking the media module back to the base module 310. By extension, these two-way links permit a module tree to be traversed from a base module downwards or from a media module upwards. The use of this feature is described later with reference to session description example 4.

The connection field of the media module 320 contains the IP multicast address and port number from which the media stream can be received.

Figure 4 is a block diagram of a session description 400 for a complex multicast session of

a multimedia conference with two tracks and a panel discussion. Each track provides multiparty video and audio conferencing and a shared whiteboard for leaving notes and messages. The panel discussion is encrypted and the whole conference is subject to a subscription fee payable in advance by each participant.

5

The session description 400 contains a top level base module 410 linked to further base modules 420, 430, 440 and an options module 411. The top level base module 410 contains data relating to the overall session including its name, purpose and timing information. The options module 411 contains details of the payment mechanism for
10 subscription fees.

Each further base module 420, 430, 440 relates to a subsession of the conference. Base module 420 relates to the first track of the conference. The base module 420 is linked to media modules 421-423, each containing connection, timing and media format data for
15 respective video, audio and whiteboard streams.

The base module 420 is also linked to options module 424 which contains data relating to a QoS policy for the first track defining which media modules are optional and which are mandatory for a participant of the first track. The mandatory list contains identifiers of
20 those media modules which are needed for the session or subsession to operate correctly whilst the optional list contains identifiers of the media modules that are not necessary for the session or subsession to operate correctly if system resources are scarce.

The base module 430 relates to the second track of the conference. It is linked to media modules 431-433, each containing connection, timing and media format details for respective video, audio and whiteboard streams. The base module 430 is also linked to options module 434 which contains data relating to a QoS policy for the second track
5 defining which media modules are optional and which are mandatory for a participant of the second track. Base module 440 relates to the panel discussion. It is linked to media modules 441 and 442, each containing connection, timing and media format details for respective video and audio streams of the panel discussion. The base module 440 is also linked to options module 443 which contains encryption details (i.e. how and where to get
10 the necessary cryptographic keys) necessary for a participant to decode the panel discussion media streams 441, 442 according to a known encryption mechanism such as DES or public key encryption.

The video media stream defined in media module 441 is layered. Layering of media
15 streams allows users with different system resources to receive as much of the stream as their system resources allows. Every user must receive the bottom layer of the stream containing the minimum stream data. However, if a user has sufficient free system resources they can receive the next layer up containing enhancements to the previous layer. Successive layers can be received enhancing the received media stream until the maximum
20 number of layers is received or all free system resources capacity is used. The media module 441 is linked to an options module 444 which contains data on the layering necessary for the end user to be able to receive the layered stream correctly.

The portion of the session description 400 generated for modules 410, 411, 420 and 440 for transmission to end users is shown below in session description example 2.

```

5      ( # overall conference session
      type=(base)
      id=(410)
      info=(title="Multimedia98 Conference")
      source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
      media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
10     time(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="13:00 GMT 25/12/98")
      options=(oc=411)
      modules=(b=420 b=430 b=440 oc=411)
      )

15     ( # conference track 1
      type=(base)
      id=(420 410)
      info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track")
      source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
20     media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
      time(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
      options=(osq=424)
      modules=(m=421 m=422 m=423 osq=424)
      )

25     ( # session QoS for track 1
      type=(option-sQoS)
      id=(424 420)
      mandatory=(421 422)
30     optional=(423)
      )

35     ( # conference panel discussion
      type=(base)
      id=(440 410)
      info=(title="MM98 Panel Discussion")
      source=(name="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
      media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
40     time(start="11:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="13:00 GMT 25/12/98")
      options=(osec=443)
      modules=(m=441 m=442 osec=443)
      )

45     ( # video for panel discussion
      type=(media)
      id=(441 440)
      info=(title="MM98 Panel Discussion Video")
      source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
50     media=(video=(type=live client=RealPlayerG2))
      connection=(226.0.0.106/1010 policy=444)
  
```

```

time=(start="11:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="13:00 GMT 25/12/98")
)
( # media QoS policy for panel discussion video
5  type=(option-mQoS)
    id=(444 440)
    mechanism=(layer=(base=226.0.0.106/1010 number=3))
)
10 ( # encryption policy for panel discussion
    type=(option-sec)
    id=(443 440)
    participant=(member=w3c)
    publickey=(location=http://www.w3.org/members_only/)
15  info=(location=http://www.w3.org/)
)
( # charging policy for entire conference
20  type=(option-chg)
    id=(411 410)
    mechanism=(type=AAA)
    price=(fee=1000GBP)
    info=(location=http://www.aaa.net/)
25  )

```

Session description example 2

Where there is surplus network bandwidth available, complete session descriptions can be announced to end users who may then elect to receive the announced session or parts thereof. However, the individual modules of the session description do not need to be announced together. If the network bandwidth available for announcements restricts the size of session descriptions, only the top level base module may be announced. In this situation, the link between modules may be a URI to a WWW or an intranet web site or server, an email address, an IP multicast address, an FTP address or details of a file or database stored on a local computer system from which an interested user can obtain the remaining modules.

The following session description example illustrates how the above session description for base module 420 would be changed if media module 421 was stored on a WWW server:

```
( # conference track 1
  type=(base)
  id=(420 410)
  info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
  time(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
  options=(osq=424)
  modules=(m=421 location=http://www.announce.org/cgi-bin/module.cgi?id=421
            m=421 m=423 osq=424)
)
```

Session description example 3

Furthermore, top level modules of a session description may be announced well in advance of the actual transmission, at a time where the final details of content are unknown, in which case the remaining levels may be made available from pre-announced links at a later time.

Figure 5 is a schematic diagram of a system for managing media stream connections at a terminal of an end user system according to the present invention.

The session control system 500 is linked to an announcement receiving interface 510 and one or more multicast-capable multimedia applications 520. The session control system 500 and the announcement receiving interface 510 are connected to a network interface 530 via which announcements may be received and multicast transmissions may be initiated and/or received.

Announcements received at the network interface 530 are routed to the receiving interface 510. The receiving interface 510 decodes each announcement to obtain the session description and displays the user oriented information from the one or more base modules in a list to the user. The user is able to select a session description from the list announcing
5 a session they wish to receive. The selected description is passed to the session control system 500 which determines which of the user's multimedia applications 520 are required for participation in the described session, starts the applications and initiates and provides the necessary media streams to the respective applications 520 via a communications manager 550.

10

The receiving interface 510 may be linked to other Internet communications applications 540 such as a WWW browser or an email client (not shown) which may be used to gather further information on the described session based on links provided in the session description. Also, where an incomplete set of base and/or media modules of a session
15 description are received, the receiving interface 510 attempts to obtain the remaining modules using the Internet communications applications prior to passing it onto the session control system 500.

20

Figure 6 is a flow chart showing the steps taken by the session control system 500 upon receipt of a session description. The description is first parsed in step 600 to identify client applications for each media module. Once this is done a second parse is carried out where applications are launched in step 610, that is to say for each media module start the application specified in the client field if that application has not already been started. The

portion of the session description relating to the respective media type, i.e. the media module, the base module directly above the media module, all other modules attached to that base module and any other options modules that apply, is passed to the corresponding application in step 620. Since the media modules are marked with appropriate client applications, each application will be able to select those media streams that it wants to participate in. The application replies to the session control system with a connection request specifying its requirements in the form of a list of identifiers of media modules from which streams are to be initiated in step 630. The connection request is assembled by the session control system in step 640 and the system then parses the session description to identify other applications to launch in step 645. If a further media type is found, steps 610 to 640 are repeated, otherwise the session control system uses the assembled connection requests to form a list of media modules. This list is passed, together with a session QoS policy, to the communications manager, a system used in by the session control system, which determines according to the QoS policies and available system resources whether each connection request is viable.

The session QoS policy is constructed in two steps:

- first, the multiple session QoS policies relevant for all the media modules to be initiated are combined into one session QoS policy
- second, the resulting session QoS policy may be adapted to take account of (a) user default preferences (defined in a user profile), (b) a user's wish to determine the policy interactively, and (c) an application's default configuration (defined in the application profile(s)).

The communications manager responds to the session control system in step 650 with an indication of the viable media stream connection requests. If necessary, the session control system may contact a charging system to initiate accounting for the session prior to requesting the communications manager to create the viable media stream connections in step 660.

Once a session starts, each received data stream relating to the session is passed to the associated multimedia application in step 670 until the scheduled stream time ends in step 680 or the multimedia application requests to the session control system that the connection is terminated in step 690, at which point the session control system disconnects the connection in step 700.

Figure 7 is a flow chart showing the QoS management step 650 of Figure 6 in greater detail.

Having received the assembled list of connection requests, the communications manager matches each item of this list to a media profile in step 705. A media profile defines requirements which must be met for the requested media stream to operate on the end user's computer including the minimum network bandwidth needed for satisfactory reception of the stream.

A terminal profile is determined in step 710. The terminal profile defines the resources

which are available at the end user's computer for use by the requested media streams. This includes available network bandwidth, free memory and disk space and available hardware such as monitor size, processor speed and free audio and video capture devices. The media profile of each connection request is compared against the available system

5 resources defined by the terminal profile in step 720. If the terminal profile matches or exceeds the media profile, the connection request is declared viable in step 730 and the terminal profile is decremented accordingly for the remaining connection requests in step 740. Each connection request is processed until there are no remaining requests or until the media profile of a request exceeds the terminal profile. In this situation, the

10 communications manager determines the optimum terminal profile the user's computer would have if all non-essential applications were not running in step 750 and whether the computer is capable of fulfilling the media profile in step 760. If the computer is capable of fulfilling the media profile, the communications manager attempts to free system resources from currently allocated streams or connection requests which have lower

15 priority or by asking the user to terminate other non-essential applications running on the computer in step 770. Alternatively, this could be done by reducing the number of layers received from a layered stream transmission. If sufficient resources cannot be found an exception is reported to the user and the connection request is marked as unviable. If the media stream that cannot be received is defined as mandatory in a QoS policy for a media

20 session or subsession, all the connection requests for that media session or subsession are cancelled in step 790. If, however, the media stream is optional, the communications manager continues processing further connection requests in step 720. Once all pending connection requests have been processed, the communications manager reports those that

are viable to the session control system.

The processing of a session description will now be described with reference to Figure 4 and session description example 4 which is the session description generated for Track 1

5 (modules 410 and 420-424 of Figure 4).

```

( # overall conference session
  type=(base)
  id=(410)
  info=(title="Multimedia98 Conference")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
  time(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="13:00 GMT 25/12/98")
  options=(oc=0010)
  modules=(b=420 b=430 b=440 oc=411)
)

( # conference track 1
  type=(base)
  id=(420 410)
  info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(video=(client=RealPlayerG2) whiteboard=(client=wb))
  time(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
  options=(osq=424)
  modules=(m=421 m=422 m=423 osq=424)
)

( # video for track 1
  type=(media)
  id=(421 420)
  info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track Video")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(video=(type=live client=RealPlayerG2))
  connection=(226.0.0.100/1000)
  time=(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
)

( # audio for track 1
  type=(media)
  id=(422 420)
  info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track Audio")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(audio=(type=live format=g711))
  connection=(226.0.0.101/1001)
  time=(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
)

```

```

5      ( # whiteboard for track 1
      → type=(media)
      id=(423 420)
      info=(title="MM98 Systems and Applications Track Whiteboard")
      source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
      media=(whiteboard=(client=wb))
      connection=(226.0.0.102/1002)
      time=(start="09:00 GMT 25/12/98" stop="11:00 GMT 25/12/98")
10     )

      ( # session QoS for track 1
      → type=(option-sQoS)
      id=(424 420)
      mandatory=(421 422)
      optional=(423)
15     )

```

Session description example 4

The session control system, having received the above session description, processes the tree structure of the session description starting at base module 410. The first module encountered is base module 420. As this is not a media module but it does have sub-modules, the session control system continues down this branch to media module 421.

The media field of the media module 421 already defines the multimedia client application required as RealPlayerG2 thus the session control system ignores it and continues to the next media module. The media field of the media module 422 does not have a multimedia client application defined, however a format for the audio data is specified. The session control system recognises that this particular audio format can be supported by RealPlayerG2 so it amends the media field to read client=RealPlayerG2. The next media module 423 has already defined a client application as wb so it ignores this module, and it also ignores the option module 424.

The session control system parses the tree structure again in order to launch client applications. The first media module 421 specifies that RealPlayerG2 should be launched, hence the session control system launches the application on the end user's system and
5 keeps a record of this activity. The second media module 422 specifies an application that has already been launched and so the session control system ignores it and continues to the next media module. The media module 423 specifies that wb should be launched, so the session control system launches the application and keeps a record of this activity.

10 RealPlayerG2 is passed the media module 421, base module 420 and modules 422-424. The application processes the media modules given to determine which it can handle, and in this case it identifies 421 and 422. Having determined which streams it can handle, the application sends a connection request back to the session control system requesting connection to the media streams of modules 421 and 422. Similarly, wb is passed the
15 media module 423, base module 420, modules 421-422, and the module 424. The application process the given modules as described previously, and requesting connection to the media stream of modules 423.

The above connection requests are assembled by the session control system into a list, this
20 list is then passed to the communications manager along with the session QoS policy module 424. The communications manager determines whether each request is viable according to the steps of Figure 7.

Assuming there are sufficient resources for all the connection requests for mandatory media streams, the communications manager passes back a list of viable streams to the session control system which then processes the tree again to determine the connection data held in the connection field of each media module so it can request that the communications manager initiate a connection to the appropriate media stream for each of the viable connection requests according to the connection data. The session control system then manages the session and its media stream connections as is described with reference to steps 670 to 700 of Figure 6.

- 10 The foregoing examples of the present invention have mostly been concerned with media session descriptions in which the client application required in order to receive a constituent media stream is explicitly prescribed. Session description example 1 discussed above is an example of a session description in which the client application is prescribed. If the client application is capable of accepting more than one media stream encoding format then this may also be prescribed. The session description may prescribe a blueprint of components, and the required configuration of the components such as interfacing and data passing, which the user's terminal must instantiate in order to participate in a media stream. The components may be, for example, for media transmission/reception, encryption or compression.

An example of a session description for such an approach is shown below:

```
( # Java Bean client blueprint declaration for Text chat session
  type = (media)
5  id=(1030,1000)
  info=(title="Text Chat")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(Java Bean=(
    <bean class="java.util.Vector">
10    <add>
      <bean class="nowhere.com.chat.StringMulticastBean" id="Multicaster">
        <property name="debug">
          <cast class="boolean"> <string> false </string> </cast>
        </property>
15    <event-binding name="message">
      <script>
        <bean source="TextArea">
          <call-method name="append">
            <property target="event:arg1" name="message"/>
20          </call-method>
          <call-method name="append">
            <string> &#10; </string>
          </call-method>
        </bean>
25      </script>
    </event-binding>
  </bean>
  </add>
  <add>
30    <bean class="java.awt.Frame">
      <property name="title" value="Chat"/>
    <add>
      <bean class="java.awt.TextArea" id="TextArea">
        <property name="editable">
35          <cast class="boolean">
            <string> false </string>
          </cast>
        </property>
      </bean>
40      <string> Center </string>
    </add>
    <add>
      <bean class="java.awt.Panel" id="Panel">
        <add>
```

```

5      <bean class="java.awt.Button">
        <property name="label" value="Clear"/>
        <event-binding name="action">
          <script>
            <property target="TextArea" name="text">
              <string/>
            </property>
          </script>
        </event-binding>
10     </bean>
    </add>
  </bean>
  <string> East </string>
</add>
15 <add>
  <bean class="java.awt.Panel">
    <add>
      <bean class="java.awt.TextField" id="TextField">
        <args>
20     <cast class="int"> <string> 20 </string> </cast>
        </args>
      </bean>
    </add>
    <add>
25     <bean class="java.awt.Button">
        <property name="label" value="Send"/>
        <event-binding name="action">
          <script>
            <bean source="Multicaster">
30     <call-method name="send">
        <property target="TextField" name="text"/>
        </call-method>
      </bean>
      <property target="TextField" name="text">
35     <string/>
      </property>
    </script>
    </event-binding>
    </bean>
40    </add>
  </bean>
  <string> South </string>
  </add>
  </bean>
45 </add>
</bean>

```

```
connection=(524.0.0.100/12345)  
)
```

Session Description example 5

5 However, as an alternative to the above prescriptive approaches, a media session description may declare the requirements in order for participation in the media stream and leave it to the end user's terminal to determine the client application required to participate in that media stream. In declaring the requirements, the session description may define the encoding format of the media stream and leave it to the end user's terminal to find a client
10 application capable of handling that encoding format. Session description example 4 discussed above is an example of this. A number of components types (e.g. video, encryption) may instead be declared which the user's terminal must select from those available to it and instantiate an appropriate application in order to participate in the session.

An example of a session description for use in such an approach is shown below:

```

( # Video client declaration
  type = (media)
5  id=(1010,1000)
  info=(title="Video stream")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(video=(codec=mpeg width=600 height=400 depth=colour))
  connection=(500.146.108.64)
10  timing=(link 1020)
)

( # Audio client declaration
  type = (media)
15  id=(1020,1000)
  info=(title="CD Quality Audio Stream")
  source=(owner="Joe Bloggs" email=joe@nowhere.com)
  media=(audio=(type=(codec=RealAudio) timing=synchroniser ticker=stock_ticker))
  source=(500.146.107.25)
20  )

```

Session description example 6

A session description may include a number of different types of media session descriptions for separate portions of the session or as alternatives to each other.

25

Figure 8 is a schematic diagram of another system for managing media stream connections at a terminal in accordance with the present invention. The system operates in a manner which is similar to that which has been described with reference to Figures 5, 6 and 7. In particular, this example is particularly useful when a session description includes

30 declarative components such as those described above.

The session control system 800 includes a session description parser 810, an application

builder 820, a number of applications and application components 830 and a communications manager 840. Upon receipt of a session description by the session control system 800, the session description parser 810 parses the session description to determine client application requirements for the media streams of the media session described by the session description. The client application requirements are passed to the application builder 820 which generates a number of possible application configurations based on the available applications and application components 830. In combination with the communications manager 840, the application builder evaluates each application configuration to determine the best configuration which is the closest match to the client application requirements whilst satisfying predetermined criteria such as quality of service, resource utilisation and user preferences. The best configuration, which may be an existing application instead of a combination of components, is then selected and instantiated. The components may include Java Beans, COM objects, MHEG objects, components from dynamic linked libraries or applications that are linkable to others such as the ActiveMovie application.

As an example, in a multimedia conference an application may be required that includes an audio component and an encryption component. Instead of selecting an application requiring many resources and offering facilities such as video which are not supported by the conference, individual Java Bean components are combined to provide the application.

The application builder may be configured to determine the best application configuration in combination with the communications manager by heuristic methods or other artificial

intelligence methods such as knowledge-based systems, neural networks or genetic programming.

Due to the heterogeneity of the Internet and differing capabilities and operating environments of end user computer systems, the session control systems described above
5 with reference to Figures 5 and 8 above have been implemented in Java (Java is a Trade Mark of Sun Microsystems Inc.). The announcement receiving interface, Session Directory, receives the announcements, displays them and passes those selected by the end user to the session control manager implemented as an application programming interface
10 running as a background process on the end user's computer.

Whilst the present invention has been described with reference to the Internet and multicast transmissions, it will be apparent to the reader that the described modular session description and the session control system are applicable to the announcement and
15 subsequent management of connections to media streams of a (multi)media session using other known transport mechanisms such as unicast.

Furthermore, although mechanisms for encryption, charging and other such services have not been explicitly described, it would be apparent to the reader that appropriate session
20 descriptions and associated functions within the session control system for their processing could be readily implemented according to the mechanism required.

CLAIMS

1. A method of announcing a description of a media session, comprising the steps of:
generating a first base module containing user orientated data relating to the media session;
5 generating at least one media module containing technical data necessary for a user to receive a media stream of the media session;
linking the first base module to the at least one media module; and,
announcing the media session by making at least the first base module available to potential recipients of the media session,
10 wherein the link between the first base module and the at least one media module permits a party to access the at least one media module and subsequently participate in the media session.
2. A method according to claim 1, further comprising the steps of:
15 generating a second base module, the second base module containing user orientated data relating to a sub-session of the media session;
linking the second base module to the first base module;
generating at least one media module; and,
linking said at least one media module to the second base module.
- 20 3. A method according to claim 1 or 2, in which a media module prescribes the application to be used to participate in the media session.

4. A method according to any preceding claim, in which a media module prescribes a number of application components to be used in order to build an application to participate in the media session.
- 5 5. A method according to claim 4, in which the media module prescribes a manner in which the components are to be configured to build the application.
6. A method according to any preceding claim, in which a media module declares a number of requirements which an application or a configuration of application components must satisfy in order to be used to participate in the media session.
- 10
7. A computer readable storage medium containing data defining at least a part of a description of a media session, the session description comprising a first base module containing user orientated data relating to the media session, wherein the first base module includes a link to at least one media module which provides technical data necessary for a user to receive a media stream of the media session, and wherein the link between the first base module and the at least one media module permits a party to access the at least one media module and subsequently receive the media stream.
- 15
8. A computer readable storage medium according to claim 7, in which a media module prescribes the application to be used to participate in the media session.
- 20
9. A computer readable storage medium according to claim 7 or 8, in which a media

module prescribes a number of application components to be used to build an application to participate in the media session.

10. A computer readable storage medium according to claim 9, in which the media
5 module prescribes a manner in which the components are to be configured to build the application.

11. A computer readable storage medium according to any of claims 7 to 10, in which
a media module declares a number of requirements which an application or a configuration
10 of application components must satisfy in order to be used to participate in the media session.

12. A method of managing media stream connections for a media session, having
obtained a session description of the media session at a terminal, comprising the steps of:
15 parsing the session description using a terminal session control system to determine one or
more applications for the or each media stream of the session description needed to support
the media session;
selecting one or more media streams identified in the session description; and,
subsequently initiating the one or more media streams so that the or each media stream can
20 subsequently be received by the terminal, wherein the session control system manages the
connections required to participate in the media session.

13. A method according to claim 12, in which the applications select one or more of

the media streams identified in the session description which are required and pass a number of connection requests to the session control system.

14. A method according to claim 12, in which the step of parsing the session
5 description includes the steps of determining application configurations to satisfy requirements identified in the session description to participate in the media session.


15. A method according to claim 14, in which the terminal session control system
parses the session description and passes at least a portion of the session description to an
10 application builder for determining the application configurations

16. A method according to claim 15, in which the application builder builds the
application(s) necessary to participate in the media session.

15 17. A method according to claim 16, in which the application builder generates or
modifies a quality of service policy for the connection request for use by the terminal
session control system.

18. A method according to claim 16, in which the application builder modifies the
20 session description for changing the subsequent management of connections by the terminal
session control system.

19. A method according to any of claims 16 to 18, in which the application is built



from a number of application components.

20. A method according to any of claims 12 to 19, in which the session description is announced in accordance with the method of any of claims 1 to 6.

5

21. A system for managing media stream connections derived from a session description of a media session, comprising a session control system for parsing the session description to determine one or more applications for the or each media stream of the session description needed to support the media session, the session control system being arranged to manage
10 connections required to receive the one or more appropriate media streams of the media session.

22. A system according to claim 21, in which the session control system further comprises means for determining application configurations to satisfy requirements
15 identified in the session description to participate in the media session.

23. A system according to claim 22, further comprising a number of application components from which the application configurations are determined and from which the applications are built.

20

24. A system according to claim 23, in which an application builder builds the applications.

25. A computer readable storage medium containing executable instructions for performing the method of any of claims 1 to 6 or 12 to 20.

24. A computer readable storage medium containing the system according to any of
5 claims 7 to 11 or 21 to 24.

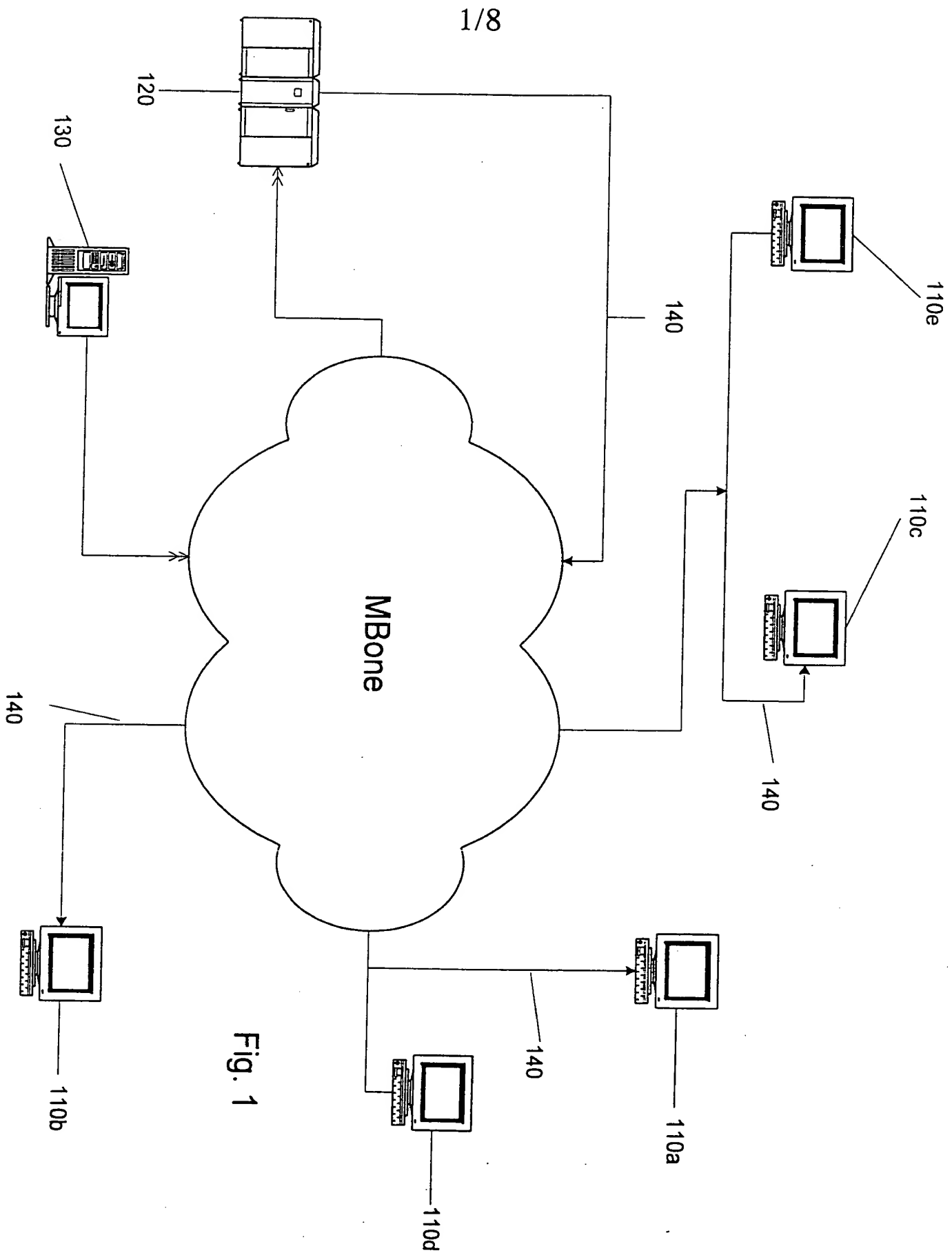


Fig. 1

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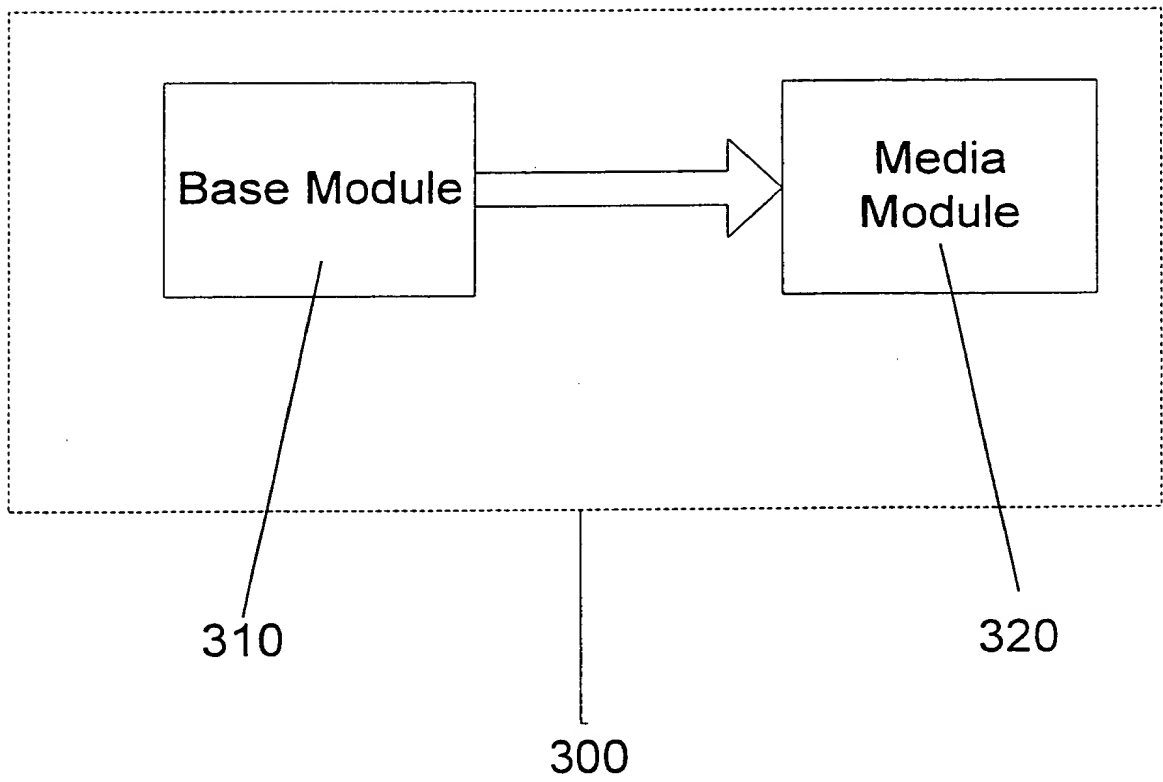
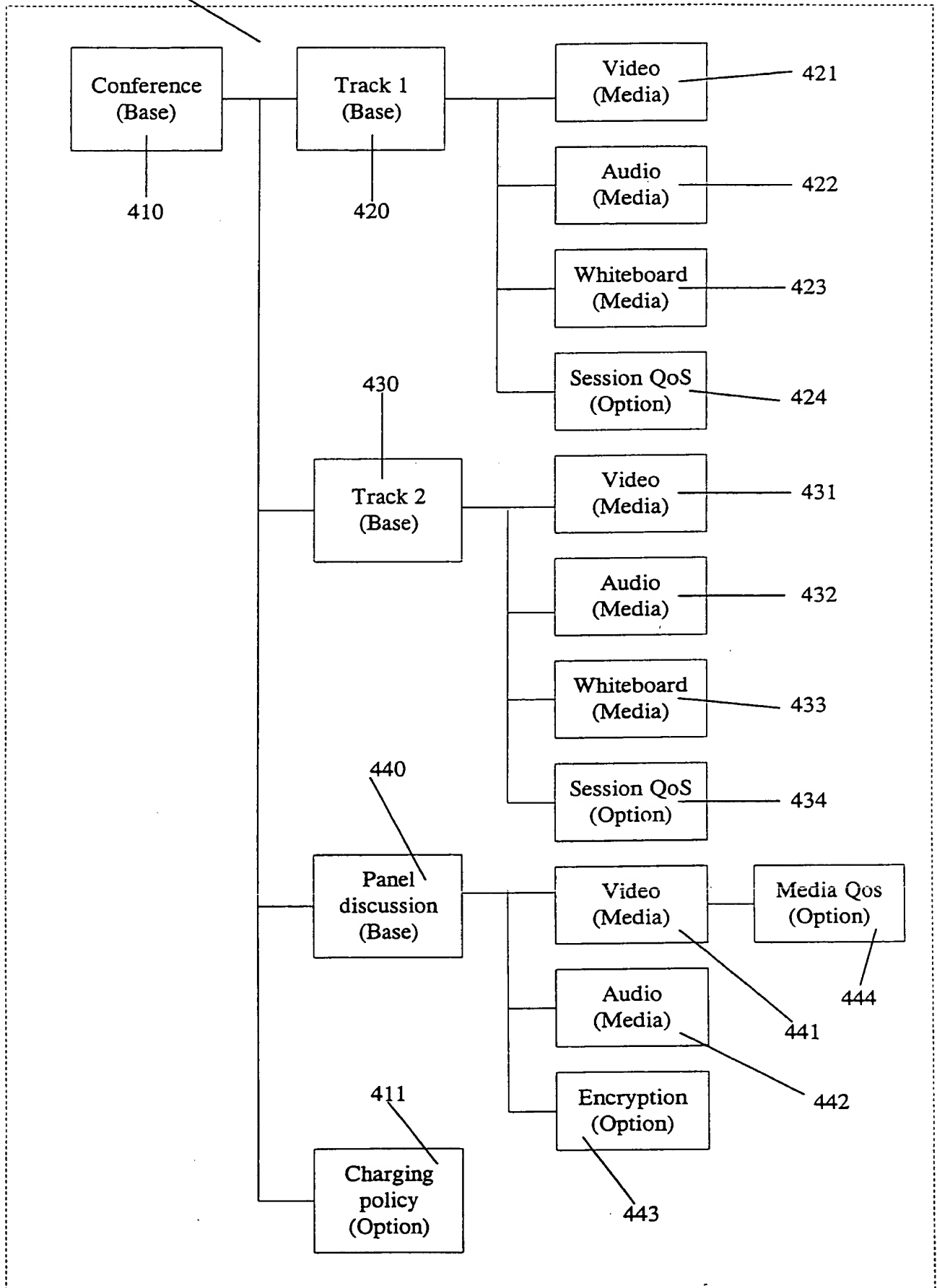


Fig. 3

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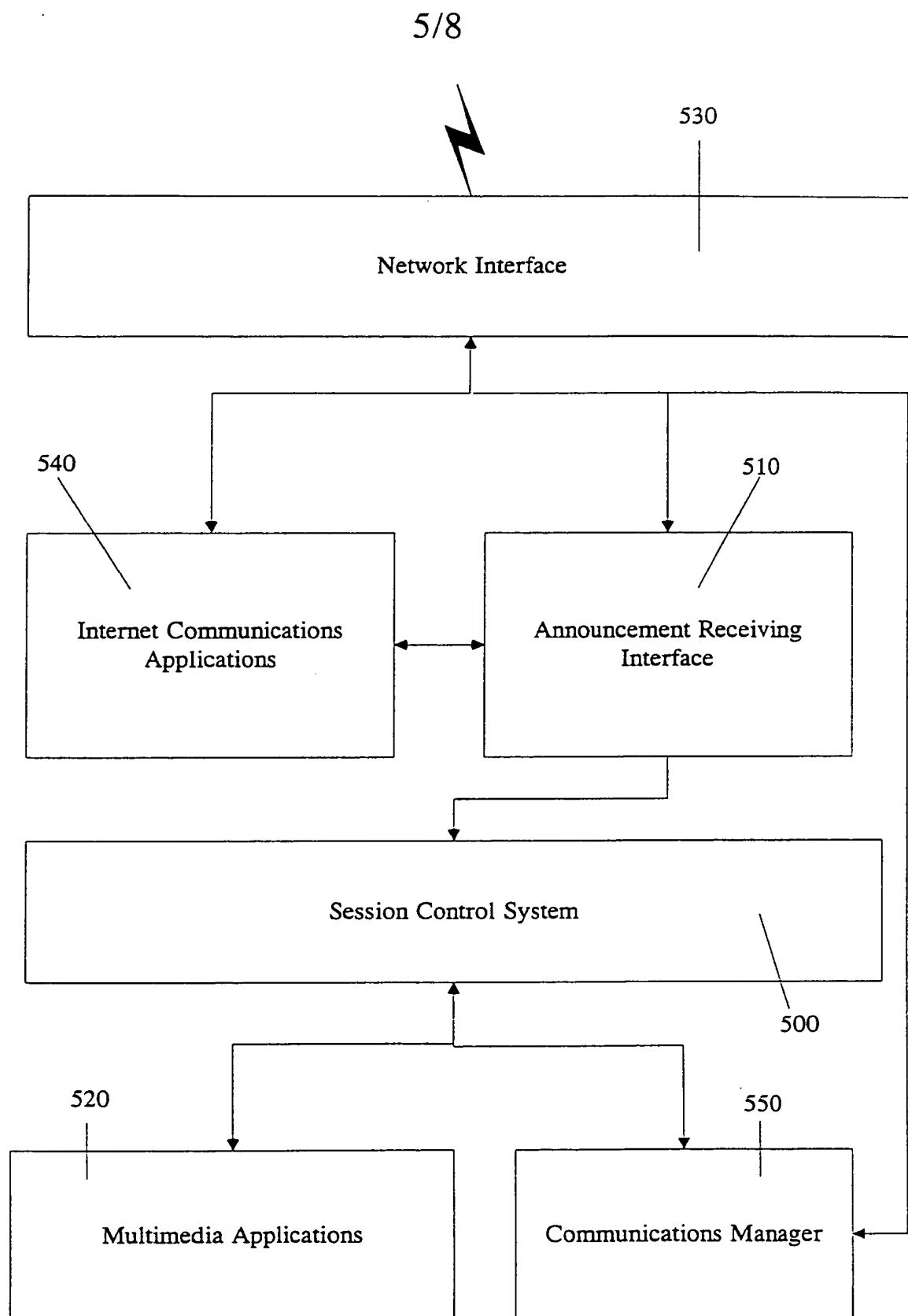


Fig. 5

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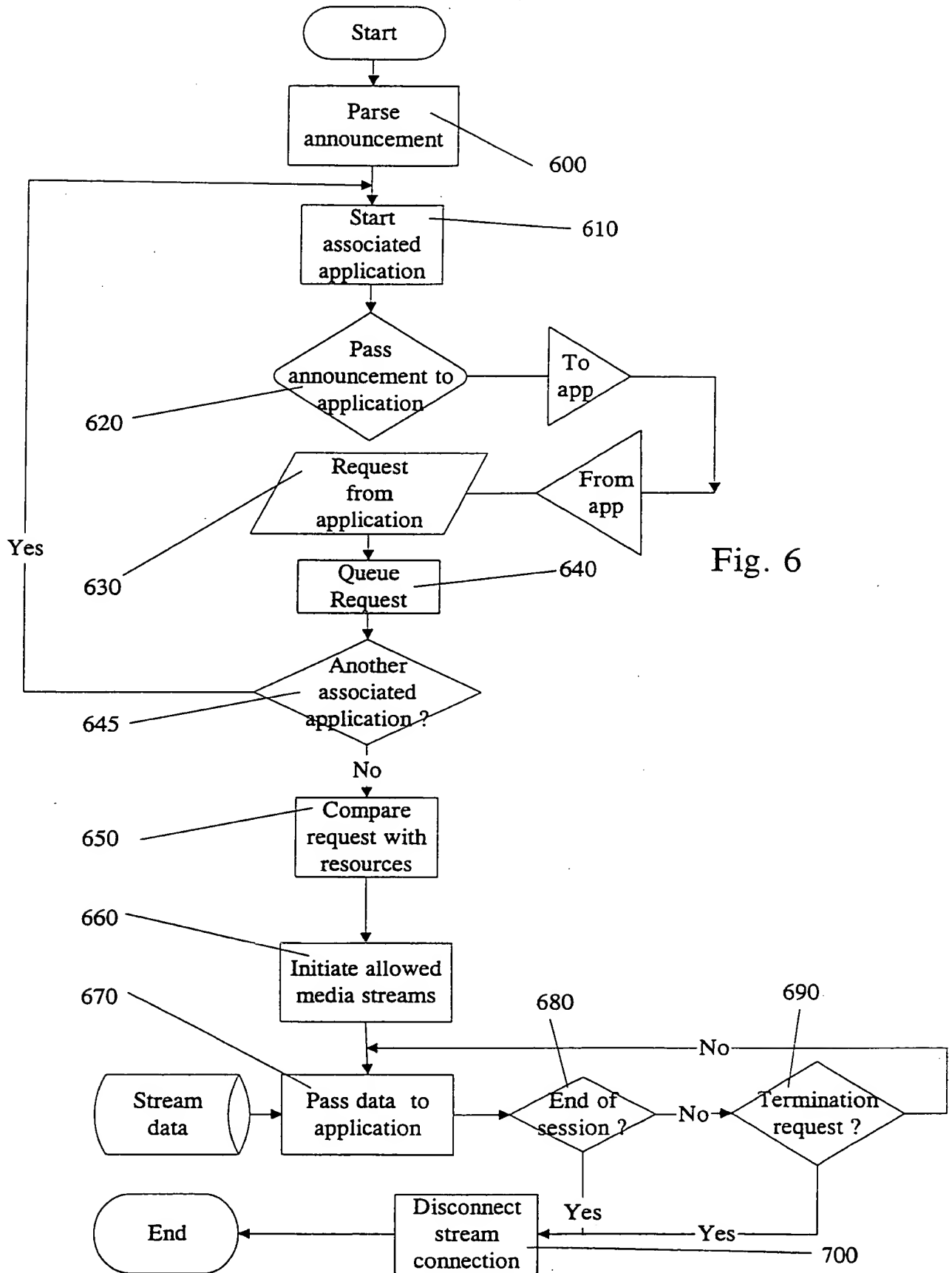
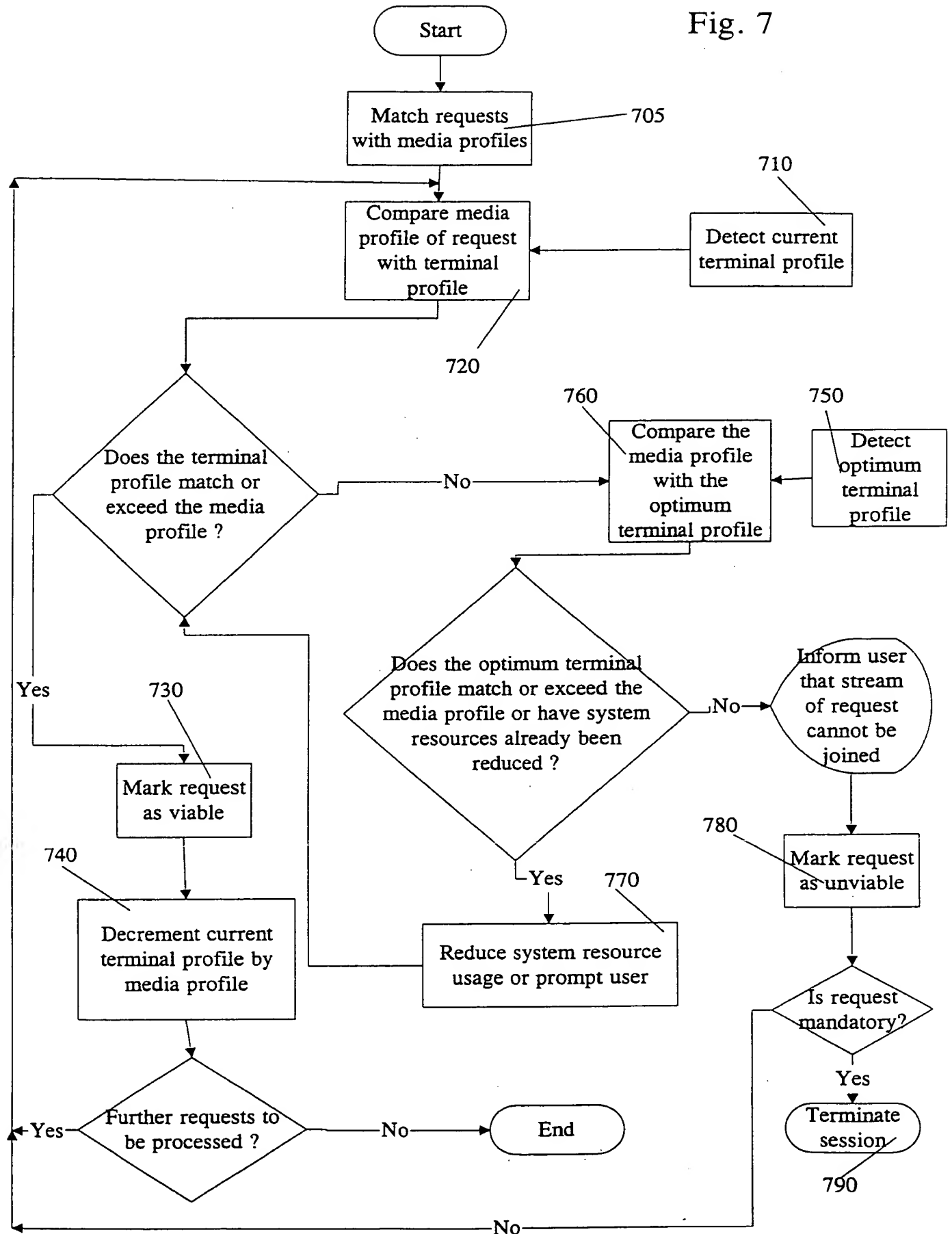


Fig. 6

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Fig. 7



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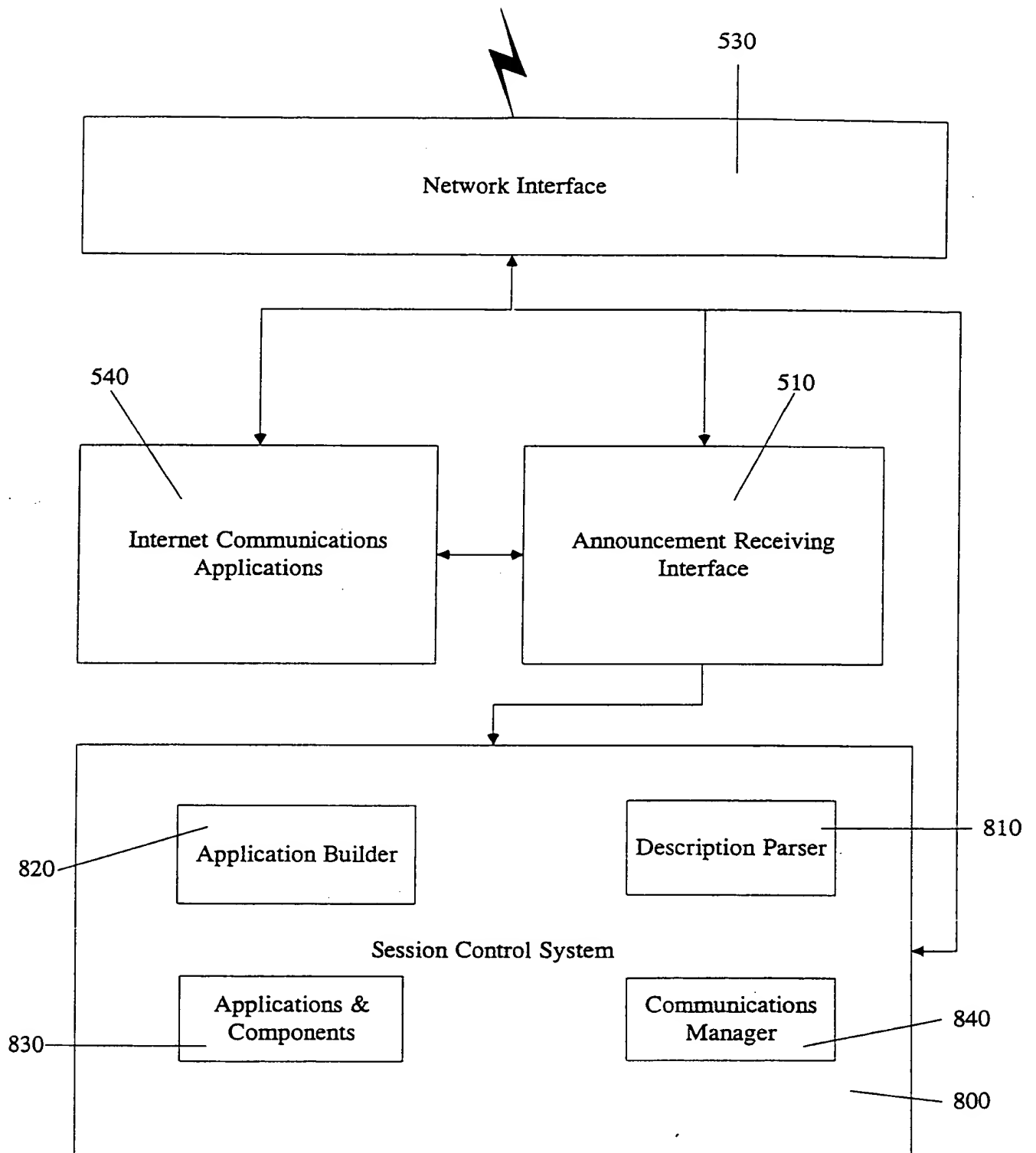


Fig. 8

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